

Eating Out

A leather anniversary at the coast

Seagulls scanned the morning surf. Wifey and I waited for our breakfast menus and took in the view, mesmerized by the crashing waves. We were both a little loopy from our all-morning romp in the deluxe accommodations at this beachfront resort.



Nothing like a few days at the coast. Ocean air is my aphrodisiac, the balm that calms my activist nerves and opens me to life's delights – the best of which was sitting right across from me, all sunny-faced and dreamy-eyed.

"Coffee, ladies?" Our server was, by all appearances, totally un-gay. Hard to know for sure, but asking can be risky – people don't always take it as a compliment when you assume they're "family." In any case, she wasn't giving off obvious-dyke vibes and didn't seem to be picking up on ours.

I generally like to chat with a friendly server, but that morning I wanted to savor the last of our private holiday. Explaining that we were there to celebrate our vertical anniversary would have entailed too much translation.

Vertical anniversary, I didn't feel like explaining, means the date we first stood up and made official our commitment to love, honor, and cherish each other. AKA our Big Fat Jewish Wedding. Wifey and I had taken this coastal getaway to celebrate our ninth anniversary, which coincidentally is associated with the gift of leather – take that where you will.

If I mentioned to our server that we were here in honor of our vertical anniversary, I'd not only have to explain vertical, but I'd have to differentiate it from our horizontal, you get the picture. We first got into that position one special night in 1987, a date we celebrate every November. Going into that kind of detail would clearly be TMI.

Unlike heterosexuals who can legally marry and enjoy a celebratory anniversary brunch without raising eyebrows, we queer people carry a bundle of complexities into our anniversaries. In Lesboland, weddings are not the only way – or even the primary way – woman-to-woman couples mark the fruition of our courtships. Our choices for acknowledging our bonds vary widely from the hetero norm. Living, as we do, under the homophobic rule of marriage apartheid, legal marriage is out of reach for most of us, and because of that celebrating our anniversaries becomes something of an act of defiance. The patriarchal origins of marriage keep the institution suspect among our kind and hardly *de rigueur*.

Then there's the mixed blessing of Oregon law allowing same-sex couples to enter into domestic partnerships come next January. It's progress, for sure, but fraught with the ambiguity of having to fight like crazy to rise to the status of separate-and-unequal. Launching into that whole rap would hardly add romance to our Sunday brunch by the sea.

Wifey gazed out the window at a pair of cormorants floating on the swells. The server filled our cups and recited the specials. Sandpipers hopped across the wet beach. My beloved slipped her foot out of her sandal and slid it slowly up my leg. The last thing the moment called for was a foreign language symposium.

Normally, whenever Wifey and I go out to eat, we each order for ourselves – independent, mutually respectful egalitarians that we are. But that morning, independence wasn't my priority. I wanted to distinguish my Wife and me from the sisters or old friends or roommates that the server seemed to have taken us for. I didn't like the idea of being seen as two "ladies" who happened to be dining together, but neither did I want to parse out our code words in a way that would elucidate and not offend. Not everyone is fluent in Lesbionics.

You can't really pass yourself off as just another everyday married couple unless you're straight. But it seemed worth a try.

"She'll have the veggie omelet," I said, casting my sweetheart an adoring smile. "And I'll have the same."

Award-winning writer Sally Sheklow's "Living Out" column has appeared in EW since November 1999.



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